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The gravity and the locomotive line continued to coexist for a number of years, with improvements being made to each as the traffic warranted. Probably the most spectacular of these modifications was that made on the gravity between Farview and Carbondale, the result of which was the well-known Shepherd's Crook.

Shepherd's Crook was on the newly-built light-car track, and derived its name from the shape, which was very much like the traditional shepherd's implement. Such a design was necessitated by the fact that there was literally no way down the mountain into Carbondale, other than to have the track wind back and forth along the sides of the valleys. The 2,000-foot curve had a diameter of about 400 feet, and returned to within 80 feet of itself horizontally and 30 feet vertically. A train passing over it could coast as far as Archbald before there was any need to apply power from the stationary engines.

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But to return, it would travel to Farview, come down over Shepherd's Crook, and at Bushwick, in Carbondale Township, cross over to a branch that took it to the main locomotive line at Lookout Junction. On the run from the crossover to either of the stations in Carbondale, it would move by locomotive power.

Traffic on the locomotive line continued to increase, so in October, 1885, a double-tracking project was undertaken on the route between Carbondale and Jermyn. Similar work between Archbald and Olyphant began in December, 1886. In 1888, the Carbondale yards, built in 1872, were greatly enlarged, four years following the completion of a new 16-stall roundhouse. The company was also constructing new breakers, and branches to reach them.

By the late 1890s, though,

it was becoming apparent that the gravity railroad was heading rapidly toward obsolescence. This was true for a number of reasons.

First, New York City, long the prime market for Lackawanna Anthracite, had been overshadowed by upstate New York, New England, and Canada, thus cutting back the percentage of the output of the D&H's mines which was shipped over the gravity and the canal. Second, the transfer of coal from the gravity cars to canal boats at Honesdale was expensive, as was the transportation of it once it was loaded on the canal boats.

With these factors in mind, the company's railroad committee reported on October 26, 1899, that it would be much more economical to ship via existing railroads, rather than continuing the use of the gravity and the canal. No doubt, this was a reference to the fact that the Erie Railroad was now in a position to take the company's coal from Carbondale to tidewater at Weehawken, NJ, via the Jefferson Branch, and its mainline.

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On January 3, 1899, the gravity was operated for the last time in its entirety as a gravity system, mainly to run off coal which had accumulated along its right-of-way. By January 22, portions of it had been converted to a standard gauge locomotive line, and it became known as the Honesdale Branch of the D&H. One month later, the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company became simply the Delaware & Hudson Company.

But even as the gravity declined and eventually disappeared, the mainline through the Lackawanna Valley prospered. Such prosperity was in spite of the fact that the D&H now had some competition from the New York, Ontario & Western Railway, which had completed its Scranton Division into the area in 1890. The line was parallel to the D&H through much of the valley, so in 1909, a new yard was built in Jermyn, the Jermyn Transfer. Although another transfer between the two railroads was already in existence in Carbondale, the new one was much more easily used, due to the larger space it provided.

Two years later, another new roundhouse was built in the Carbondale yards. By 1915, the yards themselves were enlarged to a capacity of 3,139 cars. The cost of the yard project was \$1,500,000.

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Lincoln Avenue crossing in Carbondale, did stay in operation to serve the DeAngelis and Giombetti breakers. It operated this way into the 1950s, and was then known as the Racketbrook Branch. When the Giombetti breaker closed, service was cut back to the DeAngelis breaker, which continued to operate into the early 1970s. Finally, in the late 1970s, the remaining tracks were removed.

Through these years, as the Honesdale Branch was going through numerous changes leading up to its abandonment, the mainline in the valley was also changing. The coal industry and its resultant traffic had lured a number of other railroads to the region, so that even though the Upper Valley continued to be served mainly by the D&H and the NYO&W—and to a lesser extent by the Erie—the Mid- and Lower-Valley became literally congested with railroads.

In addition to the three already mentioned, the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western, the New York, Susquehanna, & Western, the Erie & Wyoming Valley, the Central Railroad of New Jersey, and, via the Wyoming Valley, the Lehigh Valley and Pennsylvania Railroads, all carried coal from the Scranton area, each taking it in a different direction. But as the anthracite industry collapsed, the situation changed.

The Erie and the DL&W merged, in the hope of becoming more efficient and competitive. The NY&SW pulled back, concentrating its operations in New Jersey. The E&WV, by this time a branch of the EL, was abandoned, and the EL itself was in receivership, having found out that not even a major merger with a former rival could save it. The CNJ likewise was in receivership, and after 20 years in the bankruptcy courts, the NYO&W simply vanished.

The D&H, though, was different. Although it no doubt had felt the loss of the anthracite-generated revenues, the D&H had been able to withstand the failure of the coal industry due to its fortunate position as a bridge line between the Middle Atlantic states and New England and Canada. Thus, it had been able to make the change successfully to a general carrier of merchandise.

But as the other coal-carrying lines fell on financial hard times, the federal government stepped in to prevent the almost unavoidable collapse of railroad service in the northeastern and midwestern sections of the United States. The solution was ConRail, a gigantic corporation designed to insure that the trains in these industrial areas would continue to run.

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